

THE CAMBRIDGE  
HISTORY OF  
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EDITED BY  
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## Chapter 1

# LITERACY, SOCIETY AND EDUCATION

KENNETH CHARLTON AND MARGARET SPUFFORD

### The rudiments

In 1607, Christopher Meade, gentleman, and steward of the manor court of Little Gransden in Cambridgeshire, appeared in the Court of Exchequer to give evidence in a suit concerning the size and whereabouts of the demesne and the yardland in Gransden. The purchasers of this former episcopal manor could not, in a fashion not unknown elsewhere amongst this batch of episcopal sales, find their purchase, which had been farmed by the tenants since the fourteenth century. Christopher Meade was an antiquarian of considerable skill and resourcefulness, for he had searched the thirteenth-century episcopal surveys of Gransden, and the medieval reeves' accounts, and then tied the documents to surviving earthworks to reconstruct the layout of the demesne. It is the first record known to us of a local historian 'getting mud on his boots' and doing some fieldwork. Meade, however, had a considerable advantage: he had been to school in the 1570s or 1580s in the chancel of Little Gransden church with a very mixed group of the other witnesses, who, as children, had been schoolfellows. These children had talked about the rumour that houses had once stood in the Bury Close, and played over the surviving tell-tale earthworks.<sup>1</sup> So Meade's gentry status did not prevent his learning the 'rudiments' along with other village children in the church chancel.

Fifty years or so later, in 1624, John Evelyn, son of a Justice of the Peace and later High Sheriff, was nearly four when he was 'initiated' into these same rudiments in the church porch at Wotton, where his father's mansion stood.<sup>2</sup> So Evelyn too, as a small boy, mixed freely with village children. Girls were included in these groups in church porches. School had started early for Evelyn:

1 PRO, E.134, 5 Jas. I/Hil.26. Margaret Spufford, *Contrasting Communities* (Cambridge University Press, 1974), p. 35 n. 105 and pp. 188–9.

2 John Evelyn, *Diary*, ed. E. S. de Beer, vol. 1 (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 5.

it was more normal to start at six, like Oliver Sansom, the son of a yeoman, who was born at Beedon in Berkshire in 1636: ‘When I was about Six years of Age, I was put to school to a Woman to Read, who finding me not unapt to learn, forwarded me so well, that in about four months’ time, I could read a chapter in the Bible pretty readily.’<sup>3</sup> It is well to be clear what these rudiments were: reading and writing were two very distinct and separate skills, taught about two years apart. Sometimes the children had been taught reading by their mothers before even starting school.

The Christian church had always placed great responsibilities on parents in the education of their children. If anything, the Protestant Reformation increased those responsibilities, by insisting, with William Perkins, that the family should be ‘the seminarie of all other societies . . . the schoole wherein are taught and learned the principles of authoritie and subjection’.<sup>4</sup> Parents were, therefore, constantly urged to see that their offspring learned by heart the elements of their religion – the Lord’s Prayer, the Ten Commandments and the Creed – and then to read their Bible, catechism and other godly books.<sup>5</sup> Above all, great stress was laid on the importance of example – by telling the stories of Biblical personages, and more importantly by setting a good example in their own lives and behaviour.<sup>6</sup> Among the clerics Henry Bullinger was not alone in reminding parents that their ‘godly and honest conversation in the presence of their children [will] teach them more virtues and good ways than their words, for words although they may do much, yet shall good examples of living do more’. For Robert Cleaver ‘verbal instruction without example of good deeds is dead doctrine’. William Gouge likewise insisted that ‘example is a real instruction and addeth a sharp edge to admonition’. John Donne had no doubt but that ‘as your sons write by copies and your daughters by samplers, be every father a copy to his son and every mother a sampler to her daughter and every house will be a university’.<sup>7</sup> He had in mind the children of the gentry, of course.

Other children, however, also had their intellectual development attended to at home. There is so little statistical evidence bearing on reading ability

3 Oliver Sansom, *An Account of the Many Remarkable Passages of the Life of Oliver Sansom* . . . (London, 1710), p. 2.

4 William Perkins, *Christian Oeconomie*, trans. T. Pickering (London, 1609), Epistle Dedicatorie, sig. 3r–v.

5 W. H. Frere and W. P. M. Kennedy (eds.), *Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the Period of the Reformation*, 3 vols. (London: Longmans, Green, 1910), 2:6–7, 21, 48–9 and subsequent diocesan injunctions.

6 Kenneth Charlton, *Women, Religion and Education in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 92–7.

7 H. Bullinger, *The Christian State of Matrimonie*, trans. M. Coverdale (London, 1541), fol. lix v. R. C[leaver], *A Godlie Forme of Householde Gouvernement* (London, 1598), p. 260. W. Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties* (London, 1622), p. 542. *Sermons of John Donne*, ed. G. R. Potter and E. M. Simpson, 10 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1953–62), 4:100.

in the seventeenth century that we are forced to use an example from beyond the end of our period.<sup>8</sup> Right at the end of the century, the reading ability of the children entering the school at Aldenham in Hertfordshire was noted. In the 1690s nearly a third of the five-year-olds, and over half the six-year-olds could already read at entry, and had therefore learnt at home or at a dame school. These records cumulatively covered the reading ability of 127 boys, from all social groups, who entered in 1689, 1695 and 1708, aged 3–12 at entry. Of the 127, 60% could already read, and 68% came in at five, six and seven. Only 10% of the three- and four-year-olds could read.

Vernacular elementary schools, or rather their masters, were erratically licensed by the bishops to teach boys ‘reading, writing and to caste accomptes’. The boys and girls were therefore taught to read, from their hornbooks, on entry, and usually taught only to read at this stage. Girls were to be taught ‘to read, knit and spin’, though it becomes apparent that many of them were not at all unfamiliar with casting accounts later in their lives.<sup>9</sup> Learning to read from a hornbook, with its alphabet, Lord’s Prayer and perhaps a psalm, also began, of course, the religious teaching of the child, which was then reinforced by the Primer,<sup>10</sup> followed up by the New or Old Testaments. We do not know how widely the flood of schoolbooks and manuals for schoolmasters teaching reading were actually used: the very fact that there was a flood indicates a market.<sup>11</sup> But the references commonly found after the hornbook itself are to the Primer, and then to the New and Old Testaments. The Bible seems to have been the commonest of all the textbooks, and indeed, the one to which the manuals for teachers pointed. Bible stories were gripping, as the seven-year-old Thomas Boston found. He ‘had delight’ in reading the Bible by that age, and took it to bed at night, observing ‘nothing induced me to it, but curiosity, . . . as about the history of Balaam’s ass’.<sup>12</sup>

The second stage, learning to write, and possibly the third, ‘casting accomptes’, began later and continued in elementary schools at the point when

8 From the unpublished papers of Mr Newman Brown, held by the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure. We are deeply grateful to Dr Roger Schofield for drawing them to our attention. There is another set of late statistics, reflecting lower reading ability, from the Great Yarmouth Children’s Hospital, 1698–1715; David Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order: Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England* (Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 30–5.

9 Charlton, *Women, Religion and Education*, pp. 44–8, and Amy Louise Erickson, *Women and Property in Early Modern England* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993). See also p. 22 below, on Grace Sherrington.

10 Margaret Aston, *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion* (London: Hambledon Press, 1984), pp. 124–5 and nn. 71–7.

11 Charlton, *Women, Religion and Education*, pp. 78–84; Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order*, pp. 19–21.

12 G. D. Lowe (ed.), *A General Account of my Life by Thomas Boston, AM, Minister at Simprin, 1699–1707 and at Ettrick, 1707–32* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1908), p. 3.

boys of superior social status left for grammar school, as John Evelyn did. John was eight, despite his early start, when he was ‘put to learne my Latine Rudiments and to write’, in 1628.<sup>13</sup> His father later complained of his writing when he was fifteen, and he had an intensive ‘moneth or two’ at a writing-school. Despite that, and the criticisms of his modern editor that his writing in almanacs, while he was up at Oxford, was ‘almost illegible’, he began ‘to observe matters . . . which I did set down in a blanke Almanac’ when he was eleven, in direct imitation of his father, who also used almanacs for this purpose. Written texts of customals, for instance, were increasingly thought more credible.<sup>14</sup> A perfect illustration of a boy’s new skill of writing survives in the diary of an alderman of Cambridge. Mr Samuel Newton wrote in an evil scrawl, and mostly recorded the consumption of large quantities of sugar-cakes and sack and gratifying corporation occasions. There is little record of his family. Yet on 12 February 1667, he wrote, ‘on Tewsdays was the first time my sonne John Newton went to the Grammar Free Schoole in Cambridge’. In October of the same year, right in the middle of a page of the paternal scrawl, but with no paternal comment, appear neatly ruled lines, inscribed upon them in the most painstaking child’s hand

I John Newton being in Coates this nineteenth day of October Anno Domini  
1667 and not then full eight yeares old wrote this by me                      John Newton

This newly breeched boy was proud of his accomplishment, and so was his father.<sup>15</sup>

We know less about the teaching of the third of the rudiments, casting accounts, than the other two. Like reading, mathematical skills left no quantifiable data behind. But there are even some hints that reckoning, by whatever method, might have been more valued than writing. John Awdeley, composing a textbook in 1574, wrote ‘there be many persons that be unlearned, and can not wryte, nevertheless the craft or science of Awgrym [algorithm] & reckoning

13 Evelyn, *Diary*, ed. de Beer, 1:6 and p. 7 n. 1, and Guy de la Bédoyère (selected and ed.), *The Diary of John Evelyn* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1995), Introduction.

14 Adam Fox, ‘Custom, Memory and the Authority of Writing’, in *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England*, ed. Paul Griffiths, Adam Fox and Steve Hindle (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), pp. 89–116. Unfortunately, Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500–1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), came out after this text was finished. It would have been very influential. See also David D. Hall, ‘The Chesapeake in the Seventeenth Century’, in *Cultures of Print. Essays in the History of the Book* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), pp. 101–15.

15 J. E. Foster (ed.), ‘The Diary of Samuel Newton, Alderman of Cambridge (1662–1717)’, *Cambridge Antiquarian Society*, Octavo Publication 23 (1890), 17 and 23. The original is in Downing College Library, and the entry by John Newton appears on fo. 74 of the MS.

is needful for them to know'.<sup>16</sup> Recent work has made us much more aware of the need for commercial skills in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, and, indeed, has challenged the old assumption that Protestantism as the 'religion of the Book' was the main motor for improved literacy in northern Europe, rather than commerce. 'Traditionally, historians have emphasized the thirst for the printed Word as the prime cause of the thrust towards literacy in protestant countries',<sup>17</sup> but this judgement can no longer stand. In all the main commercial centres of Europe, from medieval Italy to south Germany, through the southern Low Countries to the United Provinces of the seventeenth century, commercial needs for education overrode all others, both before and after the Protestant Reformation, and before and after the Council of Trent. Both Catholics and Protestants were deeply interested in literacy. The post-Tridentine Schools of Christian Doctrine taught enormous numbers of children basic reading, writing and the newly adapted catechism in northern Italy. Religious training and vocational training for earning a living, including literacy, were important to Catholics, since lack of either indicated a deprived condition. The Protestant burghers of a town in Württemberg did not care for Luther's new Latin schools for the elite:<sup>18</sup> their 'greatest complaint [was] that their sons [had] been deprived of the opportunity to learn reading, writing and reckoning before they [were] apprenticed to the trades'. As England, a century after the Dutch, took off commercially, so also did the records demonstrate the increasing extent of borrowing and lending, and the increasing need for numeracy. The incentive to understand the bond which one had signed or marked with one's name, and which might involve the mortgage of property or the sale of one's goods, must have been a very powerful motive to acquire both skills.

Arithmetic, then, was increasingly needed. Numeracy has been too little studied.<sup>19</sup> We can proceed by the same methods as with reading, which likewise

16 *An Introduction of Algorisme: to learn to reckon wyth the Pen or wyth the Counters*, printed by John Awdeley (London, 1574).

17 John Morgan, *Godly Learning: Puritan Attitudes towards Reason, Learning and Education, 1560-1640* (Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 160.

18 Margaret Spufford, 'Literacy, Trade and Religion in the Commercial Centres of Europe', in *A Miracle Mirrored: The Dutch Republic in European Perspective*, ed. Karel Davids and Jan Lucassen (Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 229-83. For Italy, see p. 242; for German opposition to Luther's Latin schools, see pp. 245-6.

19 The only exceptions are Kenneth Charlton, *Education in Renaissance England* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), pp. 258-69, and Keith Thomas, 'Numeracy in Early Modern England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 5th ser. 37 (1987), 103-32. They both draw attention to the increasingly frequent publication of textbooks on arithmetic in the seventeenth century.

leaves no quantifiable record. We can show that elementary schoolmasters were licensed to teach this third rudiment as well as the other two,<sup>20</sup> and the seventeenth-century 'spiritual autobiographers' also provide us with enough examples to demonstrate the effects of some of this teaching.

Thomas Chubb was the son of a maltster who died when Thomas was nine. Thomas wrote of himself in the introduction to a lengthy work on the Scriptures:

The Author was taught to read English, to write an ordinary hand, and was further instructed in the common rules of arithmetick; this education being suitable to the circumstances of his family and to the time he had to be instructed in. For as the Author's mother laboured hard, in order to get a maintenance for herself and family, so she obliged her children to perform their parts towards it.<sup>21</sup>

Thomas ended up as the leader of a group of young journeymen in Salisbury, who were 'persons of reading' and who had 'paper-controversies' or written debates between themselves.

A grammar school education did not necessarily supply either fluent writing or any introduction to the 'common rules of arithmetic'. It is possible that these may have been more familiar to a boy from a vernacular elementary school than to one from a grammar school. On the other hand, Oliver Sansom, whom we know, was taken from his grammar school soon after he was ten: '[I] . . . stayed not long there, my father having occasion to take me home to *keep his book* [our italics] and look after what I was capable of in his business, which was dealing in timber and wood'. So Oliver was already capable of giving practical assistance, coming out of a grammar school. John Newton did not stay at grammar school either: his proud father apprenticed him to a dry-salter at fourteen. We become aware of a whole group of yeomen and tradesmen who interrupted their sons' grammar school education at an appropriate point when they were old enough to be of use. We also become aware of increasing references to both 'writing schools', like the one John Evelyn attended, and accounting, or 'reckoning' schools,<sup>22</sup> to which these fathers often sent their sons briefly after grammar school, to prepare them for business. This was the more necessary as the whole system of accounting was changing from the old use of a 'reckoning' board or cloth, marked out in squares, on which a sum was done using counters and roman numerals, to 'cyphering' using arabic numerals. It seems that the

20 See below, pp. 20–1, 23, 26.

21 T. Chubb, *The Posthumous Works of Mr Thomas Chubb . . . To the whole is prefixed, some account of the author, written by himself*. . . (London, 1748), pp. ii–iii.

22 Charlton, *Education*, pp. 259ff.

transition took place during the seventeenth century, when counters stopped being produced in Nuremberg, which had supplied Europe, but that the two systems ran on side by side for some time.<sup>23</sup> The earliest textbook in English already referred to the new system. It was entitled *An Introduction for to Lerne to Recken with the Penne or Counters* (1537). In Bristol, the change can be deduced from the probate inventories, drawn up by men who had been at school some twenty or thirty years before. Around 1610, 90% of inventories still used roman numerals which needed counters, but by 1650 90% were using arabic figures.<sup>24</sup>

The fullest example we have of the ability 'to write and cast accounts', which once again are mentioned together, is that of Gregory King. Here it is necessary to proceed with caution, for not only was Gregory King certainly a prodigy, but he was the son of another Gregory King, who 'being a good grammar scholar had applied himself much to the mathematicks, particularly navigation, gunnery, surveying of land and dyalling . . . at other times teaching to write and cast accounts, and being sometimes employed in designing of the more curious gardens'.

Gregory King senior was probably born in the 1620s, and his son was definitely born in 1648. Unfortunately for our purposes, the elder Gregory helped with his son's education. It was he who taught young Gregory to write when illness kept him at home when he was seven. He had been reading at three. When King wrote his autobiography, he emphasised his expertise in Latin, Hebrew and Greek, and only casually mentioned that he was so far forward by his eleventh and twelfth year that his master gave him permission to leave school early 'that he might have the liberty of attending some scholars of his own, which he then taught to write and cast accounts'. So, with the background of a grammar education, Gregory King could teach writing and casting accounts by the time he was ten and eleven, respectively. At thirteen he was both writing Greek verse of his own and surveying land by himself. But he added that his father taught him much at home until he was ten or eleven, as well as taking him out of school to help with surveying from twelve to fourteen. 'However, the knowledge he had gained in the mathematics did very well recompense' this loss. So we do not know to what extent Gregory King learnt

23 The brass casting-counters used in England were largely made in Nuremberg by two firms, Schultes and Krauwinkel, who manufactured counters specifically for school use. The last dated casting-counters by Krauwinkel were struck in 1610, and the Schultes firm closed in 1612.

24 N. E. and S. George, *Guide to the Probate Inventories of the Bristol Deanery of the Diocese of Bristol (1542-1804)* (Bristol Record Society, 1988), p. xxii.

his mathematics from his father, or whether he also learnt them at school.<sup>25</sup> Nor do we know where Gregory King senior acquired his expertise.

Yet another mystery about this rudiment of numeracy concerns the teaching of women. We know that in elementary schools, girls were to be taught only to read. Yet we also know that educated women and gentlewomen ran their husbands' estates, and 'ordinary women', the widows of the inventoried classes, were financially capable of solving the often tangled business of their husbands' holdings. We know of the distress of the baker's widow in Canterbury who had her chalked-up figures for debts for bread disallowed. But we still do not have the faintest idea how this woman had learned to add.

Very rare references survive to illuminate the position of gentlefolk whose daughters were taught at home. In 1550, George Medley of Wollaton Hall, Nottingham, bought from an itinerant pedlar 'halfe a pounce of counters for my nece to learne to caste with all'. The boarding schools established by the Augustinian canonesses for gentry daughters in Bruges in 1629, and in the later seventeenth century in Paris, included 'casting of accounts' after learning to write well in both syllabuses.<sup>26</sup> Grace Sherrington, of Lacock Abbey, was taught by her aunt at home. A page from her journal relates Grace's everyday activities in detail. It begins: 'When she did see me idly disposed, she would set me to cypher with the pen and to cast up and to prove great sums and accounts'.<sup>27</sup> Grace continues at much greater length about her needlework, music and reading. We are left to wonder whether this basic piece of preparation for a gentleman's wife was not discussed because it was so necessary and obvious that it was assumed. Five-part songs set to the lute were not.

At the point – around seven or eight years old in an elementary school – when writing and arithmetic were to be learnt, the gentlemen's and tradesmen's sons, and the sons of aspiring yeomen, parted social company; those who were to be fully literate in Latin as well as English went on to their grammar schools and different futures. The latter also went on, one may suppose, to their enjoyment of literature, the main subject of the present volume, which may be differentiated from 'cheap print' – ballads, chapbooks and jest-books.

25 'Some miscellaneous notes of the birth, education, and advancement of GREGORY KING, Rouge Dragon Pursuivant, afterward Lancaster Herald', in J. Dallaway, *Inquiries into the Origins and Progress of the Science of Heraldry* (Gloucester, 1793), pp. xxv–xxvii.

26 Caroline Bowden, 'The Education of English Catholic Women in Convents in Flanders and France', *Paedagogica Historica*, Supplementary Series 5 (University of Ghent: Centre for the Study of Historical Pedagogy, 1999), 181–2.

27 Charlton, *Education*, p. 210, and *Women, Religion and Education*, pp. 44–6. J. Collinges, *Par Nobile. Two Treatises at the Funeralls of Lady Frances Hobart and... Lady Katherine Courten* (London, 1669), pp. 3–5.

In a sense, this discussion of literate skills might be expected to stop here, or rather to go straight on to the grammar school and university education of these gentlemen and professionals, who must have made up a very large proportion of the readers of the works treated in this volume. But Latined literati were not the only readers of important works; nor were they ignorant of the whole of the contents of the cheap print being produced for those children who had only been to elementary school.

### Vernacular elementary schools

A pioneering article in 1954<sup>28</sup> first drew attention to the availability of elementary education between 1625 and 1640 in Leicestershire. In 1555 Queen Mary enacted that all schoolmasters were to be examined and licensed by bishops or other senior church officials,<sup>29</sup> although the records survive patchily. It is very difficult to say much about individual schoolmasters before 1550, although the chantry certificates refer to the practice of some chantry priests additionally teaching the rudiments. It is important to know what type of education was available in these schools for the village, but it is also difficult to establish this. The licences issued for schoolmasters which survive between 1574 and 1604 in the diocese of Ely sometimes simply gave permission to teach and instruct, but frequently the licence was issued for a specific function. It might be ‘to teach grammar’, ‘to teach the rudiments of grammar’, ‘to teach boys and adolescents to write, read and caste an accompte’, ‘to write and read the vulgar tongue’ or ‘to teach young children’.<sup>30</sup> It looks, on the face of it, as though there were both grammar and English schools, and that the latter were divided into the two types described by Professor Stone:<sup>31</sup> petty schools teaching children to write and read, and those teaching English grammar, writing and arithmetic up to the age of sixteen. All these masters were teaching alone, so the modern image of a ‘village school’ does not fit. Unfortunately, there is a great deal of inconsistency in the type of licence issued for the same village within relatively

28 Brian Simon, ‘Leicestershire Schools, 1625–40’, *British Journal of Educational Studies* 3 (1954), 42–58.

29 Helen M. Jewell, *Education in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), p. 25.

30 Elizabeth Key, ‘Register of Schools and Schoolmasters in the Diocese of Ely, 1560–1700’, *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society* 70 (1980), 127–89. Of 97 villages in the old county of Cambridgeshire in which Mrs Key found records of education, only 14 had an endowment before 1700: p. 130.

31 Lawrence Stone, ‘The Educational Revolution in England, 1560–1640’, *Past and Present* 28 (1964), 41–80.

short spaces of time. Licences not uncommonly specified the teaching of the 'vulgar tongue' or 'young children' at one visitation, and grammar at the next, or vice versa. Moreover, the college admissions registers gave evidence that boys were prepared for entrance in some villages where, according to the episcopal records, there had never been a schoolmaster, or there was not a schoolmaster at the right time, or there was only a schoolmaster who taught the 'vulgar tongue'. So licences indicate the minimum number of schoolmasters.

These suspicious contradictions render futile any attempt to establish a typology of local schools. For one thing, the definitions given in the episcopal records may not be reliable; for another, these small village schools probably changed character remarkably quickly. Many existed over a brief period only, or for the working life of an individual teacher. Others, which apparently had no continuous history, may well have had one that escaped episcopal notice. The women who taught reading, like Oliver Sansom's instructor, were hardly ever licensed at all, although, according to ecclesiastical law, they should have been, like the midwives. Yet we know such women were very common.<sup>32</sup> It is obvious that the records are impressionistic, and the impression that they give is of flexibility and change. The school held in Little Gransden should serve as a salutary reminder against too rigid definition. Little Gransden was one of the few villages with no record of any teaching. Yet we know very well from the testimony of Christopher Meade that a school did flourish there in the 1570s and 1580s, and served to teach the local gentry, and others, their 'rudiments'.

Although these Ely schools may have changed rapidly in character between 1574 and 1604, the general quality of the masters teaching in them was extraordinarily high. Nearly two-thirds of the men licensed specifically to teach grammar are known to have been graduates. A number of the remainder may, of course, have graduated as well. Much more surprisingly, a third of the masters licensed merely 'to teach younge children to read write and caste accompte' were also graduates. After 1604, however, when the licences stopped specifying the kind of teaching to be done in the diocese of Ely, no generalisations can be made about the qualifications of teachers in different schools.

In villages with few or no licences it seems probable that individual masters rather than established schools were concerned. The high academic quality of many of these men makes it very likely that they were the products of the bulge in university entrants in the period between the 1560s and the 1580s,

<sup>32</sup> Margaret Spufford, 'Women Teaching Reading to Poor Children in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', in *Opening the Nursery Door: Reading, Writing and Childhood, 1600-1900*, ed. Mary Hilton, Morag Styles and Victor Watson (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 48.

and were reduced to searching for jobs wherever they could find them. They have been found working in every county where schoolmasters' licences have already been examined. The number of college entrants taught by men in villages gives the same impression that isolated individuals were often teachers in villages.<sup>33</sup> Detailed work on the careers of schoolmasters shows that many of them were very young men doing a short spell of teaching between graduation and getting a benefice elsewhere; there was little or no permanence. It is no wonder that endowment, even of a very humble kind, had the immediate effect of establishing a school, when there were so many graduates obviously seeking work which offered an income, however small.<sup>34</sup>

David Cressy's work on the dioceses of London, Norwich, Exeter and Durham covered the counties of Hertfordshire, Essex, Norfolk, Suffolk, Cornwall, Devon, Middlesex and the City of London, Durham and Northumberland. Only the last two were markedly different.<sup>35</sup> He showed a sharp rise in the number of schoolmasters found at visitations in rural Essex and Hertfordshire from 1580 to 1592, followed by a decline in the 1620s, and a 'virtual disappearance' after the Restoration, which might of course only reflect the weakness of the church in enforcing its licensing procedure. The picture in Norfolk and Suffolk was not dissimilar: there was a boom in the number of the schoolmasters teaching in the 1590s, followed by a slump in the early seventeenth century, some recovery by the 1630s, but a severe decline after the Restoration.

In Cambridgeshire, approximately one-fifth of the villages, mainly the larger ones and the minor market towns, had a schoolmaster licensed continuously from 1570 to 1620. Maps of teacher distribution show that except in the poor western boulder clay area and the chalk down areas of the county, some sort of teacher was almost always within walking distance for a determined child in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.<sup>36</sup> In one village, Willingham, parents set up and endowed their own school. This had a noticeable effect, since it produced a group of farmers who were capable of writing wills for the whole community, as well as a college entrant. Again, there was a diminution in the number of masters recorded in the episcopal records after the Restoration. Cambridgeshire, where one-third of the masters in unendowed schools

33 This confirms Stone's impressions in 'Educational Revolution in England, 1560-1640', p. 46, that college entrants were often privately prepared in small hamlets. It is wrong to assume, as W. A. L. Vincent did in *The State and School Education, 1640-60, in England and Wales* (London: SPCK, 1950), that any village in which a college entrant was prepared automatically had a grammar school. His county lists are suspect for this reason.

34 Charlton, *Women, Religion and Education*, pp. 145-53.

35 Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order*, pp. 112-24.

36 Spufford, *Contrasting Communities*, p. 185.

licensed only to 'teach younge children to read, write and caste accompte' were graduates, did not owe its supply of teachers simply to the work of the university town at the centre of the county. Maps of the schools functioning in Kent show that, again with the exception of the poorest areas in Romney Marsh and on the downs of Canterbury, that county was also reasonably well provided.<sup>37</sup> Between 1601 and 1640, half the settlements had a teacher at some time or another, and one-eighth of them had a school functioning continuously, as opposed to only one-sixteenth of them from 1561 to 1600.

Work on the availability of teachers in north-western England shows a very different chronological picture. In the diocese of Coventry and Lichfield, covering Staffordshire and Derbyshire, north Shropshire and north-eastern Warwickshire, schools had already been established in all the main centres of population by 1640. A large number of new endowments were made between 1660 and 1699. The majority of these were intended for the teaching of reading and writing, and specifically mentioned the poor. Even more interestingly, there was general development of educational facilities between 1660 and 1700, when masters appeared in no fewer than 119 places where there had been no reference to one between 1600 and 1640.<sup>38</sup> In the north-east, likewise, literacy rates improved later in the century, especially among men in cities.<sup>39</sup>

In Cheshire, 132 places had masters teaching at some point between 1547 and 1700. There again, there was an increase in the number of teachers appearing after 1651. Analysis of the number of places for which schoolmasters were licensed in Cheshire in fifty-year periods showed a continuous increase, from 53 before 1600, to 79 in 1601–50, to as many as 105 between 1651 and 1700. Again, a map shows that schools, or rather schoolmasters, were scattered at reasonable distances all over the county, with the exception of noticeably poor areas. The child who lived in Delamere Forest or on the heath area south-west of Nantwich would not find it easy to learn to read or write.<sup>40</sup> This widespread network of elementary schools produced general reading ability except in the poorest areas.

37 Peter Clark, *English Provincial Society from the Reformation to the Revolution* (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1977), pp. 202–3.

38 A. Smith, 'Endowed Schools in the Diocese of Lichfield and Coventry, 1660–1699', *History of Education* 4.2 (1975), 5–8, and 'Private Schools and Schoolmasters in the Diocese of Lichfield and Coventry', *History of Education* 5.2 (1976), 117–26.

39 R. A. Houston, 'The Development of Literacy: Northern England, 1640–1750', *Economic History Review* 35.2 (1982), 199–216, and *Scottish Literacy and the Scottish Identity: Illiteracy and Society in Scotland and Northern England, 1600–1800* (Cambridge University Press, 1985).

40 C. Rogers, 'Development of the Teaching Profession in England, 1547–1700', unpublished Ph. D. diss., University of Manchester (1975), pp. 245ff.

### Literacy levels

Because there was approximately a two-year gap between the teaching of reading and of writing, the discussion of 'literacy' since the 1980s has been bedevilled by misunderstanding. It is the first skill, reading, which brings about cultural change and openness to the spread of ideas. Yet the ability to read leaves no trace on the printed page or in the records. It is unquantifiable. There is only one standard literary skill capable of measurement that can be used as an index for the whole population, and that is the less important ability to sign one's name. Therefore a mass of important work uses this index of 'literacy' which quantifies signatures and establishes their relationship to economic and social status.<sup>41</sup> 'Illiterate' is normally taken by early modernists to mean 'unable to sign one's name'. This skill has been conclusively shown to be tied to one's social status in Tudor and Stuart East Anglia, for the simple reason that some degree of prosperity was necessary to spare a child from the labour force for education once it was capable of work. The gap between learning to read and learning to write is unfortunately crucial. Six or seven, before writing was normally taught, was the age at which a child was thought capable of joining the workforce and starting to bring wages in.<sup>42</sup> This meant that he or she was likely to be removed from school as soon as he or she could contribute: the poorer the family, the earlier the entry into the workforce. Thus the social pyramid of literacy is precisely explained, for it was economically determined by the need for wages as well as the need not to pay the schooldame or master 1d or 2d.

Thomas Tryon, amongst the autobiographers who identified their backgrounds, came from the poorest home, and he certainly had the most prolonged struggle to get himself an education. He was born in 1634 at Bibury in Oxfordshire, the son of a village tiler and plasterer, 'an . . . honest sober Man of good Reputation; but having many Children, was forced to bring them all to work betimes'.<sup>43</sup> The size of the family did much to dictate educational opportunity, for obvious reasons. Again and again amongst the autobiographers,

41 See the pioneering work by Dr Roger Schofield, 'The Measurement of Literacy in Pre-Industrial England', in J. R. Goody (ed.), *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, ed. Jack Goody (Cambridge University Press, 1968), pp. 318–25, and 'Some Discussion of Illiteracy in England', 1600–1800' (unpublished). A part of the latter has appeared as 'Dimensions of Illiteracy, 1750–1850', *Explorations in Economic History* 10.4 (1973), 437–54.

42 Margaret Spufford, 'First Steps in Literacy: The Reading and Writing Experiences of the Humblest Seventeenth-Century Spiritual Autobiographers', *Social History* 4 (1979), 407–35, expands the summary given here.

43 Thomas Tryon, *Some Memoirs of the Life of Mr Tho: Tryon, late of London, merchant: written by himself* . . . (London, 1705), pp. 7–9.

only children, or those from small families, appear at an advantage. Despite his numerous siblings, young Thomas was briefly sent to school: 'About Five Year old, I was put to School, but being addicted to play, after the Example of my young School-fellows, I scarcely learnt to distinguish my Letters, before I was taken away to Work for my Living.' This seems to have been before he was six, although his account is ambiguous. At six young Thomas Tryon was either not strongly motivated, as he obviously thought himself from his mention of the importance of play, or not well taught. Yet it is worth remembering that he was removed from school to work at about the age Oliver Sansom began to learn. His early failure to learn to read would take great effort of will to redress.<sup>44</sup>

His contribution to the family economy began immediately and he obviously took tremendous pride in his ability to contribute. He became a spinner. Henry Best described the occupations of children in Yorkshire. His children helped dip sheep, carried mortar, cared for cattle and spread muck and molehills. The 'bigger and abler sort' were paid 3d a day and the 'lesser sort' 2d a day.<sup>45</sup> The physical ability of the child to earn 'wages' at six, or at least seven, dictated that child's removal from school, just as he was about to learn to write. Only the more unusual children overcame this handicap. Yet he, or even she, could almost certainly read. A note of caution needs to be sounded, however. The ability to 'read' at this age inevitably varied widely. One might place under the heading 'reading ability' a group of Gloucestershire shepherds who could sound out words to teach an eager boy to read, and a Wiltshire labourer who could read *Paradise Lost* with the aid of a dictionary. What all these probably had in common was the ability to read or recite the New Testament.

The social pyramid meant in practice that 'literacy could be taken for granted among the gentlemen [and professionals] of England, and although their educational experience may have altered along with fluctuations in their taste in books there was no variation from their virtually universal ability to sign'. The only exceptions were 'gentlemen' in the diocese of Durham: the north-east was more backward, and illiteracy rates amongst the gentry did not start to drop until the 1590s. However, there were no illiterate 'gentlemen' by the 1620s.<sup>46</sup> Nor understandably, were there any illiterate professionals. Those who made

44 See below, pp. 30-1.

45 Donald Woodward (ed.), *The Farming and Memorandum Books of Henry Best of Elmswell, 1642*, Records of Social and Economic History, new ser., 8 (London: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 1984), pp. 21, 24, 126, 146, 152.

46 Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order*, pp. 142-3, Graph 7.1 showing disappearance of gentry illiteracy measured in terms of ability to sign in the diocese of Durham, 1560-1630.

their living by reading and writing might be expected to be, as they were, totally literate.<sup>47</sup> Between 1580 and 1700, 11% of women, 15% of labourers and 21% of husbandmen could sign their names, against 56% of tradesmen and craftsmen, and 65% of yeomen in East Anglia.<sup>48</sup> Grammar school and, even more, university education were heavily restricted socially. From amongst the peasantry, only sons of yeomen had much chance of appearing in grammar school or college registers. There was, however, 'general and substantial progress in reducing illiteracy' amongst all social groups except labourers in the late sixteenth century, followed by some stagnation or decline both in the 1630s and the 1640s, and in the late seventeenth century. It is possible, though, that the improvements and decreases in literacy levels in East Anglia may have been quite differently timed in other parts of the country, since increasing numbers of teachers were found at periods after the Restoration in the dioceses of Coventry, Lichfield and Chester. Examination of literacy rates elsewhere might, therefore, give a substantially different picture.

The Protestation returns of 1642, which should have been signed or marked by all adult males, give, where they survive, the only seventeenth-century evidence providing a comprehensive cross-section of the results achieved by those teachers who appear in the episcopal records, and also comparisons between different parts of the country of the percentages of those unable to sign. They have been extensively quarried by historians, and are fully discussed by Schofield, Cressy and Houston. Briefly, they reveal that, from parish to parish in the countryside, a proportion of men varying between 53% and 79% were unable to sign their names.<sup>49</sup> The average was around 70%. In accordance with international convention, these figures are always expressed in negative terms, and 'illiteracy' rates rather than 'literacy' rates are cited. Despite the somewhat gloomy interpretation Schofield and Cressy have put on their analyses of the 1642 returns, it appears equally possible to reverse the image. One can point out that, where the negative statement can be made that the least advanced parishes in England had not less than 79% of illiterate adult males, so equally can the positive statement that, even in the most backward parishes in England, one-fifth of men could write their names. There was therefore an absolute minimum reading public of 20% of men in the least literate areas in 1642. Nineteenth-century evidence

47 Below, pp. 46–7, and Spufford, 'First Steps', 424–7. Houston, *Scottish Literacy*, pp. 30, 31 and 33.

48 The dates are Cressy's, *Literacy and the Social Order*, Table 6.1, p. 119. He then examines illiteracy in the dioceses of Exeter, Durham and London in Tables 6.2–6.5. See his p. 112 for discussion of the dates of his sources which 'are usually lacking before the Elizabethan period'.

49 Mapped by David Cressy as 'Illiteracy in England, 1641–4', *ibid.*, Map 1, p. 74.

suggests that those who could sign their names could also read fluently. It also shows that as many as three-quarters of the women making marks could read, since writing was normally omitted from the elementary school curricula for girls from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries.

### The passionate reader

Two years after it was ordained that the Great Bible of 1539 should be bought and placed in every parish church ‘where your parishioners may most commodiously resort unto the same and read it’, Thomas Becon was enquiring ‘But how many read it? Verily a man may come into some churches and see the Bible so enclosed and wrapped with dust . . . that with his finger he may write upon the Bible this epitaph: ecce nunc in pulvere dormio, that is to say “behold I sleep now in the dust”’.<sup>50</sup> If Becon is to be believed, in ‘some churches’ even the Prayer Book’s ordering of the reading of the Lessons was not proving effective. However, there were certainly those who were longing to read the Scriptures for themselves. William Maldon, a twenty-year-old apprentice of Chelmsford in Essex, reported that soon after the orders for the Great Bible were given, various poor men of Chelmsford bought the New Testament for themselves, and sat reading at the lower end of the church on Sundays, ‘and many would flock about them to hear their reading’. Maldon was enthused by hearing ‘their reading of that glad and sweet tidings of the Gospel . . . Then thought I, I will learn to read English, and then will I have the New Testament and read thereon myself.’ So he obtained an English primer and learnt to read from it, then clubbed together with another apprentice to buy an English New Testament, which they hid in their bed straw.<sup>51</sup> Basic literacy could be acquired even when the acquirer had not been able to attend a vernacular school.

Over a century later, another boy out of reach of schooling also ‘bought him a primer’.<sup>52</sup> At last the desire for literacy gripped Thomas Tryon about 1647:

now about Thirteen Years Old, I could not Read; then thinking of the vast usefulness of Reading, I bought me a Primer, and got now one, then another, to teach me to Spell, and so learn’d to Read imperfectly, my Teachers themselves not being ready Readers: But . . . having learn’t to Read competently well, I was desirous to learn to Write, but was at a great loss for a Master, none of my Fellow-Shepherds being able to teach me. At last, I bethought myself of a . . . Man who

<sup>50</sup> Thomas Becon, *The Early Works of Thomas Becon*, ed. J. Ayre, Parker Society, 2 (Cambridge University Press, 1843), p. 38.

<sup>51</sup> Aston, *Lollards and Reformers*, p. 214.      <sup>52</sup> See above, pp. 27–8.

taught some poor People's Children to Read and Write; and having by this time got two Sheep of my own, I applied myself to him, and agreed with him to give him one of my Sheep to teach me to make the Letters, and Joyn them together.

The difficulty Thomas found in learning to write, as opposed to learning to read, seems very important. Although his fellow shepherds, as a group, were not 'ready readers' they did, again as a group, possess the capacity to help him to learn to spell out words. He was not dependent on only one of them to help him. But these Gloucestershire shepherds could not write at all. A semi-qualified teacher was called for, and it took some effort to find him.

Thomas Tryon eventually went to London as an apprentice. His addiction to print continued. He made time to read by sitting up at night for two or three hours after his day's work was finished. His wages went on education. 'There-with I furnished myself with Books, paid my Tutors and served all my occasion.' By the end of his life, his own written works reflecting his range of interests included *The Country Man's Companion*, *The Good Housewife Made a Doctor*, *Dreams and Visions*, *Book of Trade*, *Friendly Advice to the People of the West Indies*, *A New Method of Education* and, most surprisingly of all, *Averroes Letter to Pythagoras*. It is a remarkable publication list for a boy who left school at six before he could read.

Tryon was the most dedicated self-improver we know of, but other examples of people thirsting for print exist. The unfortunate Rhys (or Arise) Evans, who initially could read but not write, made his way from the Welsh borders to London on foot after emerging from his apprenticeship. A book to read could delay him, however. He tells us:

And at Coventre I wrought and stayed a quarter of a year, by reason of an old Chronicle that was in my Master's house that showed all the passage in Brittain and Ireland from Noahs Floud to William the Conquerour, it was of a great volume, and by day I bestowed what time I could spare to read, and bought Candles for the night, *so that I got by heart the most material part of it.*<sup>53</sup>

This desire for information, together with the problems of even finding time to absorb it during the working day, or a source of light to read it by at night, seems to have been common to all largely self-educated working men. The physical difficulties the autobiographers encountered in the seventeenth century were fundamentally the same as those of their nineteenth-century heirs.<sup>54</sup>

53 Rhys (or Arise) Evans, *An Echo to The voice from heaven...* (London, 1652), p. 13.

54 David Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom: A Study of Nineteenth-century Working-class Autobiography* (London: Europa, 1981), ch. 5.

### Print: availability and use

If a large number of people could read in the seventeenth century, what was there available to read? The early modern period saw a massive increase in the production of printed books, and it is not difficult to show the increased availability of books of all sorts, from multi-volumed works to broadsheets and chapbooks, from fictive literature to doctrinal treatises.<sup>55</sup> The more difficult question remains: What evidence is there that they were read and by whom? Some does exist. John Foxe's originally Latin, folio volumes of 'The Book of Martyrs' were first of all Englished, then enlarged, and later abridged and imitated to widen their readership. Thomas à Kempis's *Imitatio Christi* was translated and protestantised to the same end.<sup>56</sup> Margaret Hoby's diary frequently refers not only to her daily reading of the Bible and other godly books but also to her reading to other members of her household. That of the literate Anne Clifford mentions what was obviously a regular practice of having various members of her household read to her from, amongst others, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (presumably in Arthur Golding's translation of 1565–7), Sidney's *Arcadia*, Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, Montaigne's *Essays* (in John Florio's 1603 translation), as well as readings from the Bible, Thomas Sorocold's *Supplication of the Saints* (1612) and Robert Parsons's *Resolutions of Religion* (1630).<sup>57</sup> Though the accounts of Samuel Blithe, Fellow of Clare Hall, Cambridge, from 1658 to 1693, show that he bought and sold to his students the usual logic and rhetoric texts of the period, he nevertheless included Donne's *Poems* (1633), George Herbert's *The Temple* (1633), Richard Crashaw's *Steps to the Temple* (1646) and the works of Abraham Cowley, as well as Richard Allestree's *Whole Duty of Man* (1658), Thomas à Kempis's *The Following of Christ* (1673 edn) and, most unusually in the context, the *Poems* of Katherine Philips, 'The Matchless Orinda'.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>55</sup> On the production of printed books, see also Chapter 3 in this volume.

<sup>56</sup> D. M. Loades (ed.), *John Foxe and the English Reformation* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1997); W. Haller, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs and the Elect Nation* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1963); D. Crane, 'English Translations of the *Imitatio Christi* in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', *Recusant History* 13 (1975), 79–100; E. K. Hudson, 'English Protestants and the *Imitatio Christi* 1580–1620', *Sixteenth Century Journal* 19 (1988), 541–58.

<sup>57</sup> Margaret Hoby, *The Private Life of an Elizabethan Lady: The Diary of Lady Margaret Hoby, 1599–1605*, ed. Joanna Moody (Stroud: Sutton, 1998), pp. xxxvi–xlii; Anne Clifford, *The Diary of Anne Clifford, 1616–1619. A Critical Edition*, ed. Katherine O. Acheson (New York: Garland, 1995), pp. 45, 51, 59, 65, 73, 76, 79, 81, 90, 102, 103, 113.

<sup>58</sup> J. Gascoigne, 'The Cambridge Curriculum in the Age of Newton as Revealed in the Accounts of Samuel Blithe', in his *Science, Politics and Universities in Europe, 1600–1800* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), ch. 3. In 1675 Brasenose College bought copies of the verse of Spenser, Cowley and Katherine Philips: I. G. Philips and P. Morgan, 'Libraries, Books and Printing', in *The History of the University of Oxford*, gen. ed. T. H. Aston, 8 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984–94), 4:676. See also P. Clarke, 'The Ownership of Books in England 1540–1640.

Contemporary poetry, aiming always ‘to profit men and also to delight’, as Arthur Golding reminded his readers in 1565,<sup>59</sup> was usually ‘distributed’ by means of circulation in manuscript from among the families of the upper class, but by the mid sixteenth century the printed press was beginning to provide for a wider readership. *The Songes and Sonnettes* of Thomas Wyatt, Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, and other versifiers, gathered and printed by Richard Tottel in 1557, was for thirty years one of the most popular collections of lyric poetry, commonly known as *Tottel’s Miscellany*. At the end of the century Robert Allott’s collection *England’s Parnassus*, Anthony Munday’s *Belvedere or the Garden of Muses* and Nicholas Ling’s *England’s Helicon*, all published in 1600, provided the reading public with an introduction to ‘the choycest floures of our moderne poets’, *England’s Helicon* figuring in a seventeenth-century collection of books with the inscription ‘Frances Wolfreston hor bouk’.<sup>60</sup> Translation, too, was making available both classical and continental literature, and by 1600 ‘with the exception of Greek lyric poetry and drama the whole of the classical heritage was within the grasp of a travelled man though he possessed little Latin and less Greek’.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, there were available for the busy or impatient the early modern equivalents of the medieval *florilegia*, of which William Caxton’s *Dictes and Sayinges of the Philosophers* (1477, etc.) was an early progenitor. The most popular was William Baldwin’s *A Treatise of Morall Philosophie Contayning the Sayings of the Wise*, first published in 1547, reprinted in 1550, ‘augmented’ by Thomas Palfreyman in 1555 and 1557, reissued by Richard Tottel, and ‘now once again enlarged by the first author’ in 1564. Altogether twenty-four different editions were printed between 1547 and 1651.

Below these levels were the layers of romances, broadsheets and ballads frequently complained of by the moralists. In the 1980s we learnt an enormous amount about this cheap print.<sup>62</sup> Bunyan himself described his favourite

The Example of Some Kentish Townsfolk’, in L. Stone (ed.), *Schooling and Society. Studies in the History of Education* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), pp. 95–111, and Charlton, *Women, Religion and Education*, pp. 177–87.

59 Arthur Golding’s metrical preface to his translation of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, *The fyrst fower bookes of P. Ovidius Nasos worke intituled Metamorphosis* (1565), sig. Biii v, and more famously in Sidney’s *Apologie for Poetrie* (London, 1595), sig. C3 v.

60 P. Morgan, ‘Frances Wolfreston and “Hor Bouks”’, *A Seventeenth-Century Woman Book-Collector*, *The Library* 6th ser., 11 (1989), 197–219.

61 R. R. Bolgar, *The Classical Heritage and Its Beneficiaries* (Cambridge University Press, 1954), p. 328. See also H. R. Palmer, *List of English Editions and Translations of Greek and Latin Classics Printed Before 1641* (London: Blades, East & Blades, 1911); H. B. Lathrop, *Translations From the Classics into English from Caxton to Chapman, 1477–1620*, *Studies in Language and Literature*, 35 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1933).

62 The change in emphasis that this has led to amongst historians as the new area has been explored is well illustrated by comparing passages written by Patrick Collinson in 1981 (*The*

reading as a youth, probably in the 1640s, in terms fuller than those of any other 'spiritual autobiographer'. It was chapman's ware. He wrote 'give me a Ballad, a News-book, *George on Horseback* or *Bevis of Southampton*, give me some book that teaches curious Arts, that tells of old Fables; but for the Holy Scriptures, I cared not. And as it was with me then, so it is with my brethren now.'<sup>63</sup> Plainly either Bunyan's relations or his peer group were, at the time Bunyan was writing in the 1660s, avid readers of the ballads and chapbooks which Bunyan himself avoided after his conversion.

Bunyan's reading seems to have left a mark on him. *Bevis of Southampton* was a typical, breathless, sub-chivalric romance in which adventure follows adventure in quick succession. The hero's mother betrays his father to death and marries his murderer. Her son first escapes and keeps his uncle's sheep on a hill near his father's castle, then is sold into slavery to the 'paynims'. There he refuses to serve 'Apoline' their god, kills a gigantic wild boar, is made a general over 20,000 men, and wins the love of the princess. Alas, he is betrayed, and thrown into a dungeon with two dragons who quickly get the worse of it. After seven years on bread and water, he is still able to kill his jailer, and runs off with the princess and a great store of money and jewels. He is next attacked by two lions in a cave, meets 'an ugly Gyant thirty foot in length and a foot between his eyebrows', defeats him and makes him his page, and kills a dragon forty feet long. He then has the heathen princess baptised, and after numerous further adventures invades England, avenges his father's death, marries his paynim lady, and is made Lord Marshal. There is no attempt at characterisation and the whole piece of blood-and-thunder writing seems aimed at pre-adolescent or adolescent males – very successfully, if Bunyan's testimony is to be believed. Although his own writing was very far removed from this, some of his imagery does seem to have come from his early reading. The lions Christian meets by the way, the description of the monster Apollyon and the cave where the giants

*Religion of Protestants* (Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 233–4) and 1988 (*The Birthpangs of Protestant England: Religious and Cultural Change in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Basingstoke: Macmillan), p. 124). Both opinions were amply justified by the state of knowledge at the time.

63 John Bunyan, *A Few Sighs from Hell, or, The Groans of A Damned Soul* (London, 1658), pp. 147–8. The italics are his. In 1631, Richard Brathwait in *Whimzies: or, A New Cast of Characters* had not been complimentary about the 'Corranto-Coiner' who was presumably the source of the news-books Bunyan enjoyed. 'His mint goes weekly, and he coins monie by it...', Brathwait wrote. 'The vulgar doe admire him, holding his novels oracular; and these are usually sent for tokens... betwixt city and countrey...' A copy of *Bevis of Southampton* survives in Samuel Pepys's collection of 'Vulgaria', 3, item 10, Pepys Library, Magdalene College, Cambridge. 'George on Horseback' is probably the chapbook *St George*. There is a copy in Pepys's 'Penny Merriments', 2, pp. 105–28, of the edition printed in the 1680s.